

NEWS ANALYSIS #1-0278  
RONALD J. DUNLAVEY

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PRESIDENT FORD ON THE WORD "DETENTE"

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES PRESIDENT FORD'S STATEMENT, IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, ABOUT THE USE OF THE WORD "DETENTE:"

VOICE: IN AN INTERVIEW MONDAY PRESIDENT FORD REMARKED THAT HE DIDN'T USE THE WORD "DETENTE" ANY MORE. THE UNITED STATES, HE SAID IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION, WILL MEET WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA---AND OTHER NATIONS AS WELL---TO SEEK RELAXATION OF TENSIONS. THE UNITED STATES, HE SAID, WILL CONTINUE ITS POLICY OF "PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH." "IF WE ARE STRONG MILITARILY," HE WENT ON, "WE CAN NEGOTIATE WITH THE SOVIET UNION, WITH CHINA AND WITH OTHERS TO MAINTAIN THAT PEACE." BUT HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WAS NOT ABOUT TO CONTINUE USING THE WORD "DETENTE" TO DESCRIBE THE PROCESS. "DETENTE," HE ADDED, "IS ONLY A WORD THAT HAS COINED---I DON'T THINK IT IS APPLICABLE ANY MORE."

NOW, IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS THAT THIS IS THE KIND OF STATEMENT WHICH, IF TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT, COULD BE MISUNDERSTOOD. THEREFORE, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE WHITE HOUSE IS INSISTING ON THE CORRECT INTERPRETATION OF WHAT MR. FORD SAID. A WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN SAID ON MONDAY---AND REPEATED ON TUESDAY---THAT THE STATEMENT DOES NOT REFLECT ANY CHANGE IN UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY. THE PRESIDENT'S FEELING---IT WAS EXPLAINED---IS, AND HAS BEEN FOR SOME TIME, THAT THE WORD "DETENTE" HAS TENDED TO LOSE ITS MEANING, TO BECOME MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISUSED. AMERICAN EFFORTS WILL CONTINUE TOWARD A RELAXATION OF TENSIONS AND TO REDUCE THE RISKS OF WAR---BUT MR. FORD WOULD PREFER THAT THESE EFFORTS BE DESCRIBED BY A DIFFERENT TERM.

ACTUALLY, MR. FORD'S REMARK IS NOT ALTOGETHER SURPRISING. THE WORD "DETENTE" HAS INDEED BECOME HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL. TO SOME PEOPLE, IT IS AN ENTIRELY ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF THE RELAXATION OF COLD WAR TENSIONS WHICH HAS TAKEN PLACE DURING THE PAST DECADE. BUT TO OTHERS, IT DESCRIDES A PROCESS BY WHICH THE SOVIET UNION TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE UNITED STATES---SEEKING FAVORS IN THE WAY OF TRADE AND TECHNOLOGY, BUT BEING LESS THAN COOPERATIVE IN SUCH MATTERS AS ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS, ACTING AGGRESSIVELY IN PLACES LIKE ANGOLA, AND CONTINUING TO PROCLAIM THE INEVITABLE VICTORY OF SOCIALISM.

AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN THIS DIM VIEW OF DETENTE ARE SOME OF MR. FORD'S POLITICAL RIVALS---POTENTIAL CONTENDERS IN THIS YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. ASKED IF MR. FORD'S DROPPING THE WORD DETENTE WERE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, THE WHITE HOUSE SPOKESHAN REPLIED: "NO." BUT IT IS OBVIOUSLY IMPERATIVE FOR MR. FORD TO MAKE SURE THAT HIS POLICIES AND GOALS ARE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD, AND HE FEELS THAT DROPPING THE WORD DETENTE IS ONE WAY TO DO THIS. IT IS EQUALLY IMPERATIVE, HOWEVER, THAT HIS REMARKS ON THIS SUBJECT SHOULD NOT BE MISINTERPRETED, OR TAKEN TO MEAN MORE THAN HE INTENDED THEM TO MEAN.